

## Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 HA-05 ACDA-12 IO-13 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05

PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 TRSE-00 OMB-01 ARA-10

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R 170858Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY KIGALI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5796

INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

C O N F I D E N T I A L KIGALI 256

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MILI, RW

SUBJECT: HORN OF AFRICA: RWANDAN REACTION

REF KIGALI 248

SUMMARY: SENIOR RWANDAN ARMY OFFICER BELIEVES US LEADERSHIP BEING PUT TO TEST BY SOVIETS IN ETHIOPIA/ SOMALIA AND IS WORRIED THAT US IS FAILING THAT TEST, THUS REPEATING ITS ANGOLA SETBACK. END SUMMARY.

1. I HAD OCCASION TO TRY TO EXPLAIN US ARMS TRANSFER POLICY AND DENIAL OF RWANDAN REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE (REFTEL) TO ACTING CHIEF OF STAFF LTC LAURANT SERUBUGA FEB 15. LIKE OTHER RWANDAN OFFICERS, SERUBUGA HAD SERIOUS TROUBLE GRASPING RATIONALE FOR OUR POLICY, IN FACE OF WHAT HE TOOK TO BE RISING TIDE OF SOVIET ACTIVITY IN AFRICA.

2. SITUATION IN HORN OF AFRICA INEVITABLY CAME UP AS

CASE IN POINT, FROM MY STANDPOINT TO DEMONSTRATE US CONFIDENTIAL

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DETERMINATION TO REDUC WEAPONS FLOWS FROM OUTSIDE AS AN INGREDIENT FUELING INTRA-AFRICAN CONFLICTS, AND FROM HIS STANDPOINT TO SHOW HOW US WAS FAILING TO MEET SOVIET CHALLENGE AND THUS LETTING DOWN ITS FRIENDS.

3. I ARGUED THAT US WISHED TO AVOID TAKING SIDES IN SUCH DISPUTES AND THOUGHT IT WISER FOR AFRICANS TO ASSUME

MEDIATION INITIATIVE. U.S. ROLE, I SAID, WAS TO TRY TO DISCOURAGE OUTSIDERS FROM COMPLICATING AN ALREADY DIFFICULT SITUATION. UNFORTUNATELY, SOVIETS AND CUBANS FELT NO SUCH COMPUNCTION AGAINST MEDDLING.

4. SERUBUGA SCOFFED POLITELY AT MY EXPLANATION, SAYING WE SEEMED TO BE CLOSING OUR EYES TO REALITY. WHETHER WE LIKED IT OR NOT, AFRICAN STATES FELT OBLIGED TO CHOOSE SIDES BETWEEN EAST AND WEST, AND SITUATION IN HORN HAD ALREADY BECOME EAST-WEST CONFLICT BEYOND AFRICAN POWER TO RESOLVE. SOMALIA MAY HAVE BEEN FOOLISH INITIALLY TO CHALLENGE OAU-RECOGNIZED FRONTIERS, BUT THAT WAS WATER OVER THE DAM. IT HAD CAST ITS LOT WITH WEST, AND NOW WEST WAS LETTING SOMALIA DOWN. RWANDANS, SAID SERUBUGA, FELT THEY WERE WITNESSING SURRENDER OF WESTERN POWER IN AFRICA, FIRST IN ANGOLA AND NOW IN HORN.

5. I ARGUED A BIT MORE WITH SERUBUGA THAT IN PAST US HAD BEEN ROUNDLY CRITICIZED BY AFRICANS AND OTHERS, IN OAU, UN AND ELSEWHERE, FOR INTERVENING IN LOCAL CONFLICTS AND ESCALATING THEM. NOR WAS VIETNAM EXPERIENCE ONE WE WOULD QUICKLY FORGET, I ADDED. SERUBUGA (WHO IS SOMETHING OF AN ATHLETE) REJOINED THAT A TWISTED ANKLE DOESN'T PERSUADE A REAL COMPETITOR TO QUIT THE BASKETBALL COURT FOR GOOD. GREAT POWERS WERE EXPECTED TO BE CRITICIZED. AS FOR RWANDANS, THEY HAD OPTED FOR TIES TO THE WEST, AND  
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IF SOVIETS CONTINUED THEIR ADVANCE IN AFRICA, THEY WOULD SOON BE MIGRATING TO THE US AS REFUGEES.

6. COMMENT: SERUBUGA HARDLY SPEAKS FOR BROAD SPECTRUM RWANDAN PUBLIC OPINION, BUT HE PROBABLY REPRESENTS THINKING OF CROSS-SECTION OF RWANDAN MILITARY COMMAND. THIS GROUP OBVIOUSLY IDENTIFIES WITH US (SERUBUGA PROUDLY DISPLAYS A PEN SET WITH US SEAL ON HIS DESK, GIVEN TO HIM BY DATT) AND WITH WEST, AND THEY HAVE TROUBLE GRASPING AIMS OF OUR ANTI-INTERVENTION, ARMS RESTRAINT POLICIES. THEIR COLD WAR MENTALITY IS ALMOST IMPERVIOUS TO ARGUMENT, AND THEY INSIST ON TERPRETING OUR REFUSAL TO ENGAGE SOVIETS HAMMER-AND-TONG OVER INFLUENCE IN HORN AS INDICATION OF DECLINING US STRENGTH AND RESOLVE.

7. FOREGOING SUBMITTED, BY THE WAY, NOT TO SUGGEST OUR POLICIES SHOULD BE ALTERED BUT TO HIGHLIGHT MISUNDERSTANDING AND UNDERSCORE NEED FOR MORE EFFECTIVE INFO EFFORTS. IN KIGALI 248 WE OUTLINED SORTS OF UPGRADED PROFESSIONAL CONTACTS WITH RWANDAN MILITARY WHICH WE BELIEVED WOULD ENHANCE OUR INFLUENCE WITH THIS KEY

TARGET GROUP (ATTACHE VISITS, VIP TRIPS TO US, FILMS,  
TRAINING MWTERIALS, ETC.) AND OFFSET, TO SOME DEGREE,  
OUR DECISION NOT TO SUPPLY MILITARY EQUIPMENT. SIMILAR  
ACTIVITIES WOULD HELP, IN OUR OPINION, TO REINFORCE  
EMBASSY'S OWN INFORMATIONAL EFFORT TO EXPLAIN US  
POLITICO-MILITARY POLICY TO RWANDAN ARMY OFFICERS.  
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